Fashion beyond identity: The three ecologies of dress

Breuer, R. L. A.

Citation for published version (APA):
2.

Undressing Plato

*I couldn’t explain my creative process to you. And, even if I could, why would I want to? Are there people who really want to explain themselves?*

Rei Kawakubo

Fashion is driven by change. It is sensational, both physiologically as well as in the sense of causing ‘widespread public interest and excitement’. And it is ambiguous in its meanings. Yet when encountering others, be it in images, in words, or in the flesh, we tend to fall back upon representational symbolics to interpret who it is we have come across. That is to say, we act along the norms of recognising and codifying strangers by rendering them swiftly, valuing their looks, and assigning them a rating using a number of, more or less, general qualities; age, gender, race and perhaps profession. In addition, we prepare ourselves when dressing for social situations by complying with the dress codes of a workplace; those that specific social situations may require; or we may create individual narratives to symbolically reflect our identity.

There is, however, more to fashion than symbolic representation

---

1 This quotation is drawn from the catalogue of the exhibition *Refusing Fashion: Rei Kawakubo*, see Drener, Hilberry, Miro (eds.) (2008) in the bibliography.
of identities. As mentioned in Chapter one, cultural sociologist Paul Sweetman argues that the clothes we wear also affect the way we move and feel (Sweetman 2001: 66). Wearing high heels and a pencil skirt with a narrow cut obviously disables certain movements, simply because one cannot take large steps and needs to balance on a relatively small surface. Dressing in new clothes can, in addition, cause excitement and make one feel ‘new’. And one certainly does experience the materiality of items of clothing, be it a lush sensation a material like silk may cause when in contact with the skin, or one of irritation when a label or coarse material does so. Fashion as such is about bodily, material, and mental experiences, and, in addition, about movement. The eeriness Elizabeth Wilson experiences in a museum of costume and opens her *Adorned in Dreams* with, can, furthermore, be associated with the preservation of the ways in which the bodies that have worn them have affected the costumes (Wilson 2003 [1985]: 1).

This chapter examines these, what one may call, ‘affective qualities’ that can be detected in relation to fashion. It argues that apart from fashion’s discourses concerning represented symbolics in dress, the materiality of both the body and the clothing, mobility, connectivity, and transformability are crucial concepts that can be deployed to gain insights into what fashion may do. Since in this dissertation fashion is regarded for all processes and forces involved in the actualisation of what people wear and thereafter, fashion is, as examined in the former chapter, not solely investigated for its signifying character. The focus hence does not predominantly lay upon what fashion means, what it may convey about the wearer, or how individuals may experience their dressed bodies. The following, instead, centres on what may happen between a body and clothing in movement, how fashion may transform perceptions, and how examining fashion’s processes and forces entails a focus upon motion, direction, and mutation.

Such an investigation is necessarily *open-ended*, since affects, movement, and change cannot be readily limited. This need not be a problem, on the contrary, it may reveal styles of thinking that have remained rather underexposed but may comply surprisingly well with fashion’s limitless character. I therefore suggest we take Dutch philosopher Baruch de Spinoza’s renowned claim that “we do not even know what a body can do” and extend it with the idea that *we do not even know what*
fashion can do.\textsuperscript{2} We do not know how future fashions may affect, how they will change, and how they shall appear as extensions of bodies that are equally unlimited in their powers. We can, however, commence our thoughts by creating an opening for the unlimited potential and ambiguity that characterises bodies, fashion, and the living. Before endeavou-ring this philosophical terrain, perhaps contrasting it with more common paths of thought serves to develop a sense of how I am attempting to move beyond identity in this chapter. That is to say, we must know how Plato dressed his ideas, before being able to undress them and change the attire of our thoughts.

\textbf{Plato’s Dress}

The renowned \textit{School of Athens} fresco (1509-1511) by Italian artist Raffaello Sanzio da Urbino, better known as Raphael, depicts Plato (on the left) dressed in a mauve coloured toga-like tunic (known in Greek as the \textit{chiton}), covered by a bright red draped cloth fastened across his left shoulder (the \textit{himation}).\textsuperscript{3} His pupil Aristotle stands beside him wearing a similar tunic and cloth, albeit in different colours and appearing slightly more frivolous due to the embroidered seems of his tunic. Aristotle, fur-thermore, wears sandals whereas Plato goes barefooted.

Although Raphael’s fresco was created almost two thousand years after Plato and Aristotle lived, and it remains in question as to whether they indeed would have worn these exact clothes and how much of their attire is Raphael’s interpretation, the style of dress was common for the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{2} The quotation ascribed to Spinoza here is actually French philosopher Gilles Deleuze’s. In his \textit{Spinoza, practical philosophy} (1970) he discusses and rephrases Spinoza’s words as presented in the Proposition II of Part III of his \textit{Ethics} (1678). I will attend to Deleuze’s philosophical concepts in the final sections of this chapter.
\item \textsuperscript{3} The Greek terms of \textit{chiton} and \textit{himaton} are further explained on: http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/171379/dress/14013/Ancient-Greece#ref168710, accessed September 2014.
\end{itemize}
ancient Greeks. When getting dressed, however, Plato will most probably not have reserved much thought, if any at all, to thinking about what to wear. In this light, Plato’s description of the dialogue Socrates has with his pupil Simmias in *Phaedo* (360 B.C.E.) is telling:

And will [a philosopher] think much of other ways of indulging the body, for example, the acquisition of costly raiment, or sandals, or adornments of the body? Instead of caring about them, does he not despise anything more than nature needs? What do you say?
- I should say that the true philosopher would despise them.

(*Phaedo*, 64e)

Although it is not a major part of my exploration of philosophy in this chapter, the quotation above does illustrate what philosopher Karen Hansen has named *The Philosphic Fear of Fashion* (Hansen 1990).  

4 See previous note and source.

5 That is to say, I am not researching the philosophical fear of fashion in »
Traditional western philosophy’s disdain for matters of the body, including the senses and therewith visual appearances, and its favouring of the rational concepts of absolute and eternal truth, knowledge, modesty and wisdom, explains why philosophers have paid little attention to fashion, which is characterised by continuous ephemeral change, a focus upon adornment, the visual, and the body. As generally accepted and also suggested by Hansen, Plato originated the chasm between fashion and philosophy one may still experience. His disdain for bodily matters and emphasis upon eternal and unchanging truths resulted in a long tradition in which philosophers regarded the ephemeral, the visual, and fashion and the body as secondary subjects.

One could, however, also turn matters around and remark that fashion does not let itself be captured in philosophical thought that centres on the soul, seeks an end to reach, and aims for absolute truth. There are no absolute truths to be found in relation to fashion, which essentially revolves around change and can only reveal ambiguously perceived meanings. Hence one may question whether the philosophical tradition commencing with Plato is suited for examining ‘modern’ phenomena such as fashion, the current conception of the body, and the visual. On the other hand, one may investigate how, and in which instances, Plato’s heritage plays its part in the ways we engage with fashion. The way physically different items of clothing are grouped under their common name, for instance, presupposes an essence to which, say, all dresses pertain. Similar essences are suggested for men, women, children, and babies and the related sections in shops (or shops themselves) where their clothing can be purchased. As such one relates to clothing for what it is: a dress itself, but rather interested in those philosophies that may show they have overcome that fear and hence may be of interest when attempting to view fashion through a prism other than that of identity and representation thereof.

In this light it is interesting to note that Facebook has extended the range of gender options members may choose from to portray on their profile to more than 70 different categories. In addition, the option to use ‘they’ or ‘their’ as pronouns to be referred to with, rather than the masculine ‘he’ or feminine ‘she’, is of interest since it indicates a plurality instead of the binary opposed and singular traditional categories. See, for instance,
or a skirt; being either for males or females, for adults or children. When visiting a store or browsing the Web visitors generally turn to the section that is suggested to represent their being, without giving it much further thought. It is an organised fashion that suits us well.\(^7\)

The current body of work one may name fashion theory, however, emphasises that fashion’s nature is essentially ambiguous, and therewith indicates that there must be more than organisation to be detected when thinking about fashion. Social, historical, psychological, semiological, cultural and anthropological theories of fashion, in addition, do not contest the idea that fashion is to be considered an essentially human, cultural and socially informed system.\(^8\) Philosophical theories of fashion remain relatively scarce and do not transcend or question the association of fashion with identity. Philosopher Lars Svendsen, for instance, examines the “supposed meaning” of fashion, that is, “fashion’s relevance for the formation of identities” (Svendsen 2006: 11). He concludes his *Fashion: A Philosophy* by arguing that fashion ultimately dissolves identity since it “pretends to have meaning but in reality has meaning to a very limited extent” (2006: 157). Svendsen thus adopts an essentially negative stance towards fashion (echoing the emptiness and meaninglessness Baudrillard (1976) associated with fashion).\(^9\)

Philosopher Marie-Aude Baronian approaches fashion in a far more positive manner in her entry on ‘Fashion and Philosophy’ for the *Encyclopedia of Aesthetics* (2014), and advocates the need “to find


\(^7\) There are, however, alternatives noticeable. The Amsterdam-based brand *Nobody Has To Know - NHTK*, for instance, does not feature sizes in the items they offer and it neither distinguishes the collection for a male or female section. From: http://www.nobodyhastoknow.net/about-us.html, accessed February 2015.

\(^8\) See Chapter 1, *Fashioning Identities*.

\(^9\) Svendson’s idea that fashion may have identity-dissolving qualities may, nevertheless, be of interest.
substance in an object that is supposed to not have any” and regard fashion “a materiality of everyday life, a creative force” (2014: 16). However, she also suggests that we need to adopt “a serious acknowledgement of the fact that fashion constructs and forms identities” (Baronian 2014: 15). Although Baronian acknowledges fashion’s creative force, she does not philosophically extend, nor emphasise, fashion’s potential beyond the representation of identities by questioning what more these creative forces may do than providing the means to communicate who we are or how we would like to be regarded by others.

Philosopher and sociologist Malcolm Barnard, in addition, proceeds towards a perspective upon fashion that acknowledges that identity is the product of differences, and as such “the product of a series of relations to other non-fixed and non-stable ‘identities’” (Barnard 2007: 185). He, however, does not centre his theory of fashion on further examining the open-ended realm of which the concepts of fashion and identity have emerged. Barnard, instead, concentrates on grasping the fashioned body as cultured and meaningful, and therewith focuses upon how fashion may ambiguously communicate the essentially undecidable and dynamic identity of the wearer (Barnard 2001: 185; 2007: 186). He, furthermore, argues that there is no fashion beyond its cultural dynamical play with meaning (Barnard 2001: 191). One may hence conclude that the aforementioned philosophers regard fashion as an essentially human, cultured and social phenomenon, and do not question what its capacities are beyond systemised perceptions.

Arguing that fashion reveals information about whom someone is, how ambiguous and undecidable this information may be, however, would presuppose that the wearer first is someone, which fashion consequently may communicate. A similar grounding of existence upon being can be noticed when fashion is deployed to deceive one’s identity and another is constructed through the clothes that are being worn. Whereas the latter pertains to the idea that we possess authentic selves, both points of departure regard fashion within the boundaries of human culture, and what is more, they assume there is an ongoing unity to our being. On the other hand, one may remark that philosophical thought, such as that of Judith Butler (1990) and Friedrich Nietzsche, also argues that we may contend that the concept of (gender) identity is first and foremost a linguistic reduction of experiences, and as such limited. We
think of ourselves as unified wholes and relate to the world surrounding us predominantly from the ‘I’ that perceives it. It is from this perspective that other ‘Is’ are encountered and systems are erected to distinguish identities.

As Joanne Entwistle has claimed fashion is about the body (2001:1). Since the mind-body dualism is no longer common in western post-war philosophy, is it then not precisely in philosophical thought we may discover the “challenging and rigorous conceptual and theoretical reflections” to begin to understand fashion for its creative and material forces and potential, as advocated by Baronian (2014: 16)? What happens if we create a concept of fashion that succeeds to surpass culturally constructed concepts such as identity, fashion, and representation? Since fashion is rarely viewed and thought about from a perspective upon what it may do beyond the boundaries of human, cultured bodies, it seems we are in need of new concepts which allow us to do so. I therefore challenge Barnard’s contention that thinking about fashion beyond the boundaries of cultural practice is to demand “an end or outside to the play of differences” (Barnard 2001: 191). I am convinced an attempt must be made to create a concept of fashion that enables thinking about the realm of experience that precedes and succeeds the production of concepts such as identity, representation, and ultimately fashion itself. That is to say, the question becomes what fashion’s capacities are before they are assigned the role of communicating the identity of the wearer, and (in consequent chapters of this dissertation) what these capacities are after one, for

10 For more information about monist thinking regarding the mind-body see, for instance, Gabriel Marcel (1950) *The Mystery of Being, vol I. Reflection and Mystery*, Great Britain: Hague Gill & Davey Ltd. In particular ‘Chapter V, Primary and Secondary Reflection: the Existential Fulcrum’ (pp. 90-102) is of interest in this light.

11 Philosopher and artist Erin Manning does explore the encounters between textiles (clothing, fabric) and the sensing body in movement. See, for instance, her article about fashion designer Rei Kawakubo (to whom I will return in this chapter), titled ‘Dress Becomes Body: Fashioning the Force of Form’ (2014). In addition, gender studies scholar Stephen Seely has written an article about affective fashion, “fashion that seeks to harness the body’s capacities for transformation and connection” (Seely 2013: 248).
instance, discards items of clothing.

The prerequisites for such an experimental perspective of fashion would be that it allows including the open-ended, unlimited, and potential qualities that characterise identity, fashion, and bodies. It is also a perspective that caters for a thinking about fashion, its forces and processes, before they are regarded essentially human. That is to say that experiences and the events human bodies encounter cannot be convincingly limited to an understanding within the realms that are the result of rendering experiences, events, and encounters into systems that predominantly focus upon human culture and meaning. I will therefore in the following sections turn to three philosophers that have taken on similar endeavours and have extended their thinking beyond the boundaries erected by viewing reality through social, cultural or psychological systems.

Whereas an undressed Plato would apparently result in the display of a broad and muscular body when he was young, as an elderly philosopher the sight would most probably be less appealing. Plato would presumably not have been opposed to appearing naked. As described in the opening of this section, according to Plato a true philosopher does not care about, nor need clothing, but focuses on a rational and rhetorical approach to reality. Sartorial matters would merely distract him from his focus on eternal truths, unchanging ideas, and getting to know his soul. As previously mentioned it is of interest to examine some ‘dissident’ philosophers that reveal that Plato, much like the naked emperor in Hans Christian Anderson’s 1837 tale, dressed himself in ideas. Truly undressing Plato would thus entail stripping off his ideas and revealing what may be found underneath.

12 The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy – IEP states that Plato’s given name was Aristocles and “Plato”, was a nickname after platos meaning ‘broad’, “perhaps given to him by his wrestling teacher for his physique”, from: http://www.iep.utm.edu/plato/, accessed April 2015.
David Hume’s Jumper

A pair of high-heeled shoes that are too tight to move around in comfortably are perhaps worn at times and places where the representational value of the shoes supersedes the discomfort they may cause. Once home the shoes will most probably be taken off to offer the now sore feet some comfort. One is hence prepared to endure physical pain and master it in exchange for symbolic connotations of elegance, sexiness, or power. Moreover, after having mastered the initial pain, one often associates the wearing of high heels with pleasurable occasions and may enjoy the way the shoes alter one’s posture, height, and movement. There is, in other words, an ambiguity to be found in the way we relate to fashion and the body. One is willing to make certain physical sacrifices for being able to move the body more elegantly or to share one’s exquisite taste with others. When there is no reason or motivation to do so one will most likely choose bodily comfort above representational values.

Whereas conscious thought about fashion may result in a search for meaning, signification, and the construction of systems through which these may be charted, the body appears subsumed and controlled by the mind. Typically, the body is assigned a secondary position which appears to be disciplined and guided by the mind. When one is unhappy with one’s body because of the gaining of weight, for example, thoughts are assigned the role of recognising the situation, mastering and altering it. We are consciously aware of the unwanted state of our body and encouraged, by diet advice and workouts, to gain control over it in order to reach a more desirable state. In such a situation our conscious thoughts are called upon to change the body: ‘do not eat those chocolates’, ‘you must exercise’, ‘carbohydrates are bad for you’, are just some common examples in which the mind seemingly prevails. Similarly, the pain or discomfort experienced when wearing high-heeled shoes or too tight clothes can be overcome or consciously ignored and the mind seems to control bodily experiences.

If one, however, intends to research what a body and fashion may do, the apparent prevalence of the mind over the body must also be questioned. What may be said about the forces of the body? Even though one
must bear in mind we cannot fully know what a body or fashion can do, it is nevertheless of interest for fashion research to examine its role in relation to both thought and clothing being worn in connection with the body. I therefore suggest firstly turning to the *System of Human Nature* as suggested by empiricist philosopher David Hume (1711-1776) and examine what his philosophy may reveal about fashion’s affective and material qualities in relation to our bodies, senses, and ideas.

*An Itchy Jumper and Sore Feet*

Imagine a Scottish grandmother who has lovingly knitted a brightly coloured jumper for her grandson. The smell of the hand cream she applied before knitting has infused the yarn, the size is ideal, and the colours of the wool she used complement the eye-colour and complexion of her grandson well. Say this grandmother was philosopher David Hume’s and he would have put on the jumper to protect him from the cold breeze in his study. The fit is perfect, he likes the colours, and the faint smell reminds him of the Sunday afternoons he has spent at his grandmother’s house. However, soon after putting on the jumper Hume experiences a rash so intense he can no longer hold his pencil and concentrate on writing down his thoughts. Instead, he uses the pencil to scratch his neck and back; he is completely overtaken by the terrible itching sensation, and ultimately sees the need to take off the jumper in order to return to his writing. Apart from the fact that the jumper will most probably not be worn again, one may question how the experience Hume had just undergone would influence the writing he attended to afterwards.

The situation sketched above is obviously fictitious, yet it may illustrate how Hume mobilises a perspective upon bodily sensations, the way they are experienced and as such influence our thinking, rather than concentrating solely or primarily on conscious judgements. Whether an itchy jumper caused Hume to think things differently or there were other influences that helped him do so, is not that important. The interest lies in the fact that physical discomfort, such as the rash caused by coarse wool in the example above, may be so intense that it prevents one to concentrate on anything else. Whereas traditional philosophy focuses upon the construction of rational and rhetorical arguments to reach the
truth, Hume, being an empiricist rather than a rationalist philosopher, takes the physical or bodily sensations as a starting point for thought. Examining his theory may hence enable a new perspective upon what happens when fabric and form encounter a body.

Hume opens his *Treatise of Human Nature* (1739) as follows: “All the perceptions of the human mind resolve themselves into two distinct kinds, which I shall call Impressions and Ideas” (1.1.1). Rather than mainly focusing on ideas and truths, Hume commences his treatise with the concept of perception, which he *then* divides into impressions and ideas. For Hume perceptions may thus be sensory (impressions) as well as reasonable (ideas). When we come across a dress in a shop, we see it, feel the fabric, and may think about whether its colour will combine with a pair of shoes we already own. If one smells the body odour of another body that has tried on the item one may decide to cast it aside, even though it did meet all the other criteria that made one go in search of a new dress in the first place. Our perceptions of the dress are thus manifold, appear to occur in swift succession and will typically influence each other; the idea that the dress is what one is looking for may be abandoned due to sensory perceptions that disagree. On the other hand, ideas influence the way we dress and bodily discomfort, such as the wearing of high heels may evoke, is overcome and dealt with. Further following Hume may gain some insights into his systemising of human nature.

Impressions, Hume elaborates, are “those perceptions, which enter with most violence and force [...] our sensations, passions and emotions” (1.1.1). Hume may have loved the jumper his grandmother knitted from many perspectives, the moment he experienced the force of the itching sensation the wool caused on his skin, he could no longer perceive of anything else before taking it off. In addition, our passion for shoes may be so strong we know we have plenty of pairs but cannot stop ourselves to purchase yet another pair. The initial pain experienced when putting on high heels may be forceful, but is eventually conquered. Whereas the former examples of bodily experiences appear so intense they succeed to overpower all opposing ideas that may occur in the mind, the latter features an opposing character and the mind and its ideas appear stronger

13 All references in this section are from David Hume’s *Treatise of Human Nature* (1896 [1739]) and appear as follows: (book.part.section).
than the initially experienced physical discomfort.¹⁴

Ideas, in Hume’s concept of perceptions, are “the faint images of these [impressions] in thinking and reasoning; such as, for instance, all the perceptions excited by the present discourse” (1.1.1). A pair of Christian Louboutin heels with their typical red soles that may be regarded a sign of exquisite taste, are the result of a fashion discourse in which Christian Louboutin is considered an iconic shoe brand that represents wealth, power, classiness and fashion savviness. Discourses in fashion may direct which styles, colours and brands are in fashion at a certain time and place. For Hume ideas, and thus discourses, are less forceful (‘faint images’) than the impressions that precede them. This implicates two things: firstly, impressions of sensation must occur before ideas can come into being and secondly, discourses in fashion appear less faint than Hume characterises them. The question then becomes how initial sensations of discomfort are transformed into a situation one bears with due to the discourses in fashion.

Hume’s systemising of human nature in which the senses are regarded a prerequisite for ideas to come into being already marks a break with traditional philosophical doctrines in which the senses are distrusted and thought and reason are regarded primary for discovering truth. His systemising of human nature does not end here. Hume distinguishes simple impressions and ideas from complex ideas. The pain experienced when wearing high-heeled shoes for the first time is categorised as a simple impression of sensation that will lead to the simple idea that the combination of high-heeled shoes and one’s feet amount to a painful sensation. Apart from pain Hume adds pleasure, thirst and hunger and heat and cold to his list of simple sensations that can be directly connected to bodily experiences and as such lead to simple ideas (1.2.1).

Although thirst and hunger are not yet, nor commonly, connoted with fashion, the pleasure experienced from the sensation of fabric embracing one’s skin, from the sound shoes may make when walking, from those colours that complement our complexions, and the smell of perfumes can certainly be regarded as directly perceived sensations that lead to

¹⁴ It is important to regard the mind (ideas) and the body (sensations or impressions) here as a double bind, i.e. they may be seen as the two ends of the one rope, rather than as separate entities.
simple ideas. In addition, experiencing heat and cold are sensations that most often lead to adjusting our attire. The more forceful the heat or cold is, the less we are concerned with fashion’s discourses. Very few people would worry whether the coat that is offered to them when near to freezing pertains to a fashion discourse. And after running a marathon in expensive and up-to-date sports attire very few people are concerned about the look of the silver thermal blanket they cover themselves with afterward to prevent heat loss occurring too quickly. Whenever possible and appropriate, people obviously do take off layers of clothing when confronted with high temperatures.

Apart from simple impressions of sensation Hume distinguishes a second branch of impressions which he names impressions of *reflexion* (1.2.1). An impression of reflexion results from one of sensation which resides in the mind as a copy or simple idea. Influenced or mediated by other ideas, this copy or idea of the original sensation “produces new impressions of desire and aversion, hope and fear” (Ibid.). In other words simple ideas have an anticipatory character and may lead to a desire to be regarded taller than one is, or to be able to walk more elegantly, which high heels may cater for. The Figure below, which schematises Hume’s writing, may help to clarify his concept – or system – of perception further. As mentioned above, Hume distinguishes two kinds of perceptions: those of sensation and those of ideas. All ideas, however, must find their origin in sensations thus all fashionable discourses must also be somehow traced back to sensations.

Take the idea that wearing high heels is elegant, may signify fashion savviness, and wealth, as would most probably be the case if the shoes were designed by Christian Louboutin.15 This idea as a “faint image[s] of [impressions or sensations] in thinking and reasoning” is, according to Hume’s theory, the result from the perception of a forceful sensation of either pain or pleasure.16 If one agrees that the experience of wearing high

---


16 Hunger, thirst, heat and cold are omitted, since these sensations are unlikely »
heels for the first time is most likely a painful rather than a pleasurable one, the question remains how pain becomes pleasure. Following Hume’s system, the initial simple idea would be that the high-heeled shoes in combination with one’s feet result in pain. Impressions of reflection may subsequently cause fear of pain or an aversion for high-heeled shoes, but also a desire to be regarded taller. Reflections inform and are informed by imaginings that transpose and change ideas (see Figure 2.2). The association of high heels with pain may transform into the idea that high heels are sexy through what Hume names the three principles of association: “Resemblance, Contiguity in time or place, and Cause and Effect” (1.4.1). Memories inform ideas by repeating earlier impressions however,
not without ordering and positioning them.

Say, that after the initial impression of pain, one encounters others also wearing high heels (resemblance) who do not seem to be in pain, but on the contrary, enjoy the gained body length they experience. Such a sighting transposes the initial simple idea of high heels and pain into the more complex idea that they may also be associated with a pleasure of appearing taller. The initial forceful sensation of pain has played its part, but it is no longer directly related to the more complex idea of high-heeled shoes as means of gaining height. This transposed and complex idea is essentially fictive since it is the result from imaginings, but nevertheless finds its origin in a forceful impression of sensation. Similarly the idea that heels make one appear taller, which now resides in the realm of ideas and as such is part of fashion’s discourse may lead to subsequent imaginings (see Figure 2.2). The associative principle of resemblance can change this initial idea into new ideas, for example that appearing taller by wearing high heels also entails empowerment. Further associative resemblances may bring about a complete range of different ideas and associations that may be related to the wearing of high heels, such as the idea that they are essentially female, that long legs are more desirable than short ones, or that the wearing of high heels is a sign of refined class.

The associative principle of contiguity (being in contact or proximity) may account for the idea that the popularity and success of specifically the red-soled Christian Louboutin shoes is the result from them being worn by actress Sarah Jessica Parker in the popular Sex and the City 2 film (2010). Many others that know the film (and the series), and transpose the popularity of it to their own aims then may associate the idea of wearing Louboutin heels with sexual allure. Hence, new imaginings come into being, such as the idea that Louboutin shoes reveal fashion savviness, fame and enhance sexual powers. In addition these

---

17 For an account of high heels as empowering rather than submissive see ‘Objectifying Gender: The Stiletto Heel’ by Lee Wright (1989) in Barnard 2007, pp. 197-206.

associations may, in their turn, result in the idea that these connotations are not suitable for children and hence heels worn by a child are regarded inappropriate.

The styles, colours and items or brands of clothing that are fashionable at a certain time, can hence be regarded as Humean ideas. Although the sensations that caused these ideas to come into being may no longer be detected since they have been transposed by imaginings and have become complex ideas, according to Hume, there, nevertheless, must have been sensations that preceded them. The colours that characterise the seasons of autumn (deep red, brown, and ochre) and spring (pastels, white, and green) may be regarded sensations that have led to similar colours being in fashion in catwalk shows, editorials and shops leading up to these seasons. It is however also in our nature to transpose and change ideas - and hence fashion’s discourses - through imaginings. In other words we may be aware of a certain discourse, such as one initiated by a magazine, a celebrity or a designer belonging to what Barthes named the fashion group (1967).¹⁹ This awareness or idea will not lead to an exact copying of the item or style proclaimed to be fashionable. As such the transposing qualities of Hume’s principles of association explain the dynamics with which fashion discourses are adopted in society well.

Hume’s third principle of association, the relation of cause and effect, can also be related to the wearing of high-heeled shoes. Hume himself writes that when it comes to simple ideas, such as that the heat of a fire causes skin to burn when one comes too near, an inseparable connection is stored in our memory. When, however, one thinks of more complex ideas, such as the increased sales of Louboutin shoes perhaps due to its contiguity in time with the Sex and the City 2 film and series, the effects can easily be found in the sense that sales of the shoes raised and they could be seen worn by celebrities and the fashion savvy. Although one cannot be certain about the exact cause, no matter how obvious the relation between the popularity of Louboutin’s red-soled high-heeled shoes and the success of the Sex and the City films and series may seem, this may not have been the only reason for the increased sales. The complexity of the associations of ideas and their continuously transposing and changing nature, causing new ideas to be created from existing ones,

¹⁹ See Chapter 1.
makes it impossible to determine which combination of ideas led to the success. One could argue that although the effects can be measured, the causes remain ambiguous due to the complexity of the association of ideas. Or as Hume writes: “effects are everywhere conspicuous; but as to its causes, they are mostly unknown, and must be resolv’d into original qualities of human nature, which I pretend not to explain” (1.4.6).

Returning to the initial question as to how, according to Hume, the painful experience of wearing high heels is transformed into pleasure, the repetition of earlier impressions by the faculty of memory is of importance. Operating in relation to, and influenced by imaginings, reflexions and ideas, memories repeat earlier impressions, but not without ordering and positioning them. By repeatedly wearing high heels the initial painful experience is transformed by the faculties of the mind into a pleasurable one which becomes to be believed so strongly that the initial painful impression of sensation is still present but also overcome, or overruled, by the mind which contemplates it.\(^\text{20}\) Appearing taller, moving more elegantly and perhaps gaining power are therefore positioned above and before any physical discomfort that may be experienced.

Hume’s system of human nature emphasises the primacy of impressions of sensation when it comes to perceptions; only these occur naturally in the common sense of the word. All ideas, discourses and thinking are, in Hume’s account, the result of sensations that have been transposed into complex ideas by creative imaginings and repetitive memories. Moreover, all ideas are fictions precisely due to the fact that they need to be imagined before coming into being. Human nature in Hume’s system of perceptions then has a systematic character, which is coloured by the habits with which we transform sensations into ideas. In addition, ideas are changed because they may resemble other ideas, appear at the same time or are regarded an effect of similar causes. The imaginative causes that we connect to noticeable effects cause a belief in the superiority of ideas. Apart from using Hume’s system (see Figure 2.2) to detect how discourses in fashion develop, one can also raise attention

\(^\text{20}\) I here refer to Gilles Deleuze’s reading of Hume as reflected in *Difference and Repetition*. Deleuze writes: “Repetition changes nothing in the object repeated, but does change something in the mind which contemplates it” (2004 [1968]: 90).
for fashion’s sensational capacities unmediated by ideas, memories and imaginings. These sensations are perhaps mainly found in material qualities: colours and shapes, smells, tactile qualities, sounds (and perhaps even tastes) that stop all thought and evoke pleasure with a force as powerful as that of the woollen jumper that prevented Hume to think.

The fictive character of the imaginings does not entail that they are altogether negative. On the contrary, Hume is concerned with the sympathetic effects of imaginings resulting from experiences such as helping and praising others and enjoying beauty (3.1.20; 3.3.1). However he does not elaborate his thoughts about the imaginings of artists that may become impressions of sensations for others. Although an artist or designer may experience sensations that are then transposed into complex ideas, these complex ideas – which one can also name the artist’s creations – may also be a source of new impressions of sensation. Independent fashion designers may use a whole range of sensations and imaginings when designing an item of clothing, many of which they are possibly unaware. The item of clothing, which is the result of both sensations and imaginings, can in its turn also evoke impressions of sensation that potentially have never been experienced before. These artistically produced impressions would then be, at least partly, the result of imaginings that become complex ideas and may potentially arouse new impressions. In this sense, an arrow could be added to Figure 2.2, running from ‘Imaginings’ to ‘Impressions’. Or, allegorically speaking: Hume forgot his grandmother. Which is not to say that she was an artist, but that Hume does not mention the possibility that imaginings may lead to new and original impressions rather than to complex ideas alone.\footnote{This is not to say that Hume does not value artistic expressions, on the contrary, his ‘imaginings’ do emphasise the importance of regarding humankind as inventive species. I do, however, suggest that Hume’s system does not elaborate upon, nor emphasise the position of an artist (or a grandmother) that may succeed in producing impressions of sensation. He, in other words, does not distinguish a concept of ‘artistic impressions’. Also see, for instance, Dabney Townsend’s elaborate study of Hume’s aesthetics (2001) in which he writes that “[o]ne of the most striking absences in Hume’s references to aesthetic emotions is any means of production of art” (2001: 145).}

Although Hume does not emphasise the artistic potential to evoke
sensations, he does provide us with a systemising of the typically human nature that explains how forceful sensations are changed into fictive ideas. In other words, our nature has a basis in what we sense, but is also typically fictive and is characterised by thinking and reasoning. Whereas traditional philosophy does not search for a ground to our thoughts and regards it an a priori and superior asset of human beings, Hume emphasises that there must be something that makes us think and argues that all thinking finds its origin in the perception of forceful sensations. The example described above in which the sensation of pain and discomfort is changed into ideas of sexiness, empowerment and fame illuminates the complexity and ambiguity with which discourses in fashion come into being. Hume enables a perspective upon fashion that allows thinking about how complex ideas in fashion can be related to imitation (resemblance) and contamination (contiguity). It is also a perspective that reveals the essential ambiguity of the causes for changes in fashion well. As such Hume’s system of human nature emphasises the ever-changing dynamics of ideas, whilst also reminding us that the grounds for our complex ideas must be situated in sensations that do not separate us from other sensing animals. All thinking, knowledge and ideas must be preceded by impressions. Although impressions may be reflected upon, ideas may evoke new ideas to occur and memories may aid our belief in the ability to know the exact cause of an effect, Hume is convinced that associations of ideas are essentially imaginative and influenced by habit and belief. In this light it is of interest to examine what Hume has to say about the individual that perceives the sensations and ideas. I therefore will examine his perspective upon personal identity and question how this relates to the way in which fashion is engaged with to signify someone’s being.

22 Since Hume reflects upon these issues throughout the first book of the Treatise, I suggest turning to Deleuze’s summary of his thinking: ‘In his work, the association of ideas accounts effectively for habits of thought, everyday notions of good sense, current ideas, and complexes of ideas which correspond to the most general and most constant needs common to all minds and all languages’ (Deleuze 1991 [1953]: 101).
Hume devotes a separate section (VI) of the first book of his *Treatise of Human Nature* (1739) to personal identity in which he starts by criticising the traditional philosophical view; those philosophers who without further proof “imagine we are every moment intimately conscious of what we call our Self” (1.6.1). Apart from being determined to unravel the system of thought and find its basis in sensory rather than rational traits (as examined above) Hume ventures out to do the same for personal identity. Thus he does not accept an a priori idea of ‘self’. The quotation above already indicates that Hume regards a philosophical idea of personal identity the result of imagination. This indicates that the concept of self is, in Hume’s system of perceptions, a fictitious idea, operating along the lines of the association of ideas, guided by inaccurate beliefs in – and habits of – deploying resemblance, contiguity and cause and effect to come to thought (see Figure 2.2). We call ourselves ‘I’ and we consequently experience a continuous self; others around us do the same and strengthen the idea of being someone.

For Hume all ideas must have arisen from an impression and he searches for the impression that may have initiated the idea of self. Which impression, one that has entered with force, has led to this idea? Hume writes that the self is “that to which our several impressions and ideas are suppos’d to have a reference” (1.6.2). But in his system of human nature there cannot be such an overarching and invariable reference without itself being the result of an impression. That is to say, if there was such a reference as ‘self’, it must be the result of an unchanging and constant impression and according to Hume, those do not exist. Impressions, such as pleasure, pain, passions and sensations “succeed each other, and never exist at the same time” (1.6.2). Hume concludes that since the idea of self is not derived from an impression it cannot truly exist and must be an imagining. We are hence no more than our perceptions, or as Hume writes:

---

23 Gilles Deleuze characterises Hume’s philosophy with these words in his preface to the English-language edition of *Empiricism and Subjectivity* (1991 [1953]: x).
For my part, when I enter most intimately into what I call myself, I always stumble on some particular perception or other, of heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure. I never can catch myself at any time without a perception, and never can observe any thing but the perception. When my perceptions are remov’d for any time, as by sound sleep; so long am I insensible of myself, and may truly be said not to exist.

(Hume 1896 [1739]: 1.6.3)

We are therefore dependent upon our perceptions, which are a combination of impressions and ideas, in which ideas – such as the idea of self – must be a result of impressions and sensations. Since impressions of sensation, in succession, inform and create ideas, which are then copied, stored in memory and associated to form new imaginings – new fictive ideas – Hume regards personal identity a fiction: “[W]e are nothing but a bundle or collection of different perceptions, which succeed each other with an inconceivable rapidity, and are in perpetual flux and movement” (1.6.4). Rather than discovering a principle unity to our being Hume rejects the concept of self and emphasises the rapidity and movement with which our perceptions constantly change.

The clothes we wear perhaps aid a feigning of unity to our being since they are most often worn over a longer period of time. We may recognise people at least partly and during a specific time by particular items of clothing. A mother searching for her daughter in a play area full of other children may spot her due to the brightly coloured T-shirt the girl is wearing. In addition, items and styles of clothing can become representatives for whom or what someone is. “That dress is so you” is an example of how we relate items of clothing to an ongoing unity of self. Repeating such impressions of ideas – adopting a specific style of dress – then fortifies the essentially fictive idea of self or personal identity. Fashion, as seen through Hume’s system of perceptions, pertains mainly to the realm of ideas in which faint images of thinking and reasoning come into being. The clothes we wear are, however, also capable of evoking impressions of sensations, as examined in the former section. Perhaps fashion, viewed through Hume’s prism, can be said to bear both a rational, thought-based, character as a sense-based one, and it is the latter that – partly due to fashion’s identifying traits – seems neglected when thinking about
fashion.

The question remains as to why we tend to ascribe an identity to ourselves and the things surrounding us even though no evidence for either self or identity can be detected. Since in fashion theory and practice the performance of identity is prevalent (as examined in Chapter one), Hume may clarify how the tendency to think in order of identities arises, what characterises it and what an alternative perspective would entail. Having explained that identity cannot belong to perceptions nor can they unite them into an unchanging entity, Hume states that identity “is merely a quality we attribute to [perceptions], because of the union of their ideas in the imagination” (1.6.15). For Hume the union of ideas takes place according to a “customary association of ideas” through resemblance, contiguity or cause and effect (Ibid. [emphasis added]). In relation to personal identity Hume points out that it is in memory that we discover and produce identity. In our memories we simplify our perceptions since we cannot possibly store all perceptions that work upon us, thus we will seek resemblance amongst different perceptions and hence order them according to an imagined whole which we call ‘I’.

We can also imagine our future identities, or if we relate this to fashion decide which outfit we would need to communicate a different identity from the one we have communicated today. Here, according to Hume, causation comes into play and a second principle of imagination is at work, for no true causes of complex ideas can be detected (1.4.6). Causation (or cause and effect) will play a part for only a limited amount of memories and as such contributes to the simplifying of perceptions through customisation of them. One can only perceive of an identity by drawing on memories which are simplified and limited perceptions. In relation to the clothes one wears one stores only those simplified perceptions that can convincingly be united to a whole. The idea that wearing high heels is part of one’s work identity is preserved, whereas the initial sensation of pain related to the wearing of high heels is forgotten and overcome along with the reasons why. The clothes one wears on the basis of the favoured memories and the causation that one can imagine a future identity inform the ideas. High heels may be adopted for changing one’s identity through a desire for more success and power. Here high heels may be regarded as a causative factor whereas this is, according to Hume, also an imagination.
Current or future identities are, whether fashion related or not, fully dependent on imagination which operates by customisation of more complicated and constantly changing perceptions. This customisation comes about through language:

"[A]ll the nice and subtile questions concerning personal identity can never possibly be decided, and are to be regarded rather as grammatical than as philosophical difficulties. Identity depends on the relations of ideas; and these relations produce identity, by means of that easy transition they occasion."

(Hume 1739: 1.6.20)

We are accustomed to using words and this habit causes us to simplify, limit and order perceptions around a feigned unity we call ‘self’.

In relation to the clothes we wear a comparison with Hume’s theory may be drawn which leads to confirm that the notion of communicating your identity through the clothes you wear is a fiction. A fashion identity is the result of systems of imagination active in human ‘nature’ and wholly dependent on a habitual way of using language to create resemblances, favouring certain memories over others and feigning an ordered and ongoing unity, which would exist without being the result from impressions. Whereas the creation of a fictional identity through fashion reveals the productive power of imaginations, Hume emphasises that there is more than imaginative ideas alone. If memories and imaginings are omitted from Hume’s system of perceptions one is left with direct impressions and sensations, unmediated by the associations of ideas. A Humean fashion could then also be a fashion of the senses rather than a fashion of ideas. It is as if one views fashion through a prism that does not show beliefs about what is in fashion at a certain time, nor which meanings our clothes are imagined to communicate, since these are no more than the faint images of the forces upon our bodies that impressions of sensations bring about. Hume’s prism in addition reveals a fashion that can cause shivers of excitement, warm the heart, or that emphasises a discomfort that is difficult to overcome. It is a fashion that itches, caresses and enables or disables movement; a fashion of astonishing sights, lovely or hardly bearable smells, loud or wonderful sounds; possibly in the future one that you can even taste.
Hume breaks with the philosophical tradition that since Plato revolved around the discovery of truth through reasoning; the development of self-knowledge through contemplation; the revealing the essences of what something or someone *is*. Hume questions the nature of knowledge and demonstrates it rests upon cultural conventions such as language and customs, but finds its true origin in the more forceful impressions bodies may encounter. He emphasises the importance of sensory experiences as prerequisites for less perceptible ideas. Lastly, Hume shows that it is not necessarily philosophy’s task to discover the truth, but to reveal the logic of the system that leads to the habit of saying ‘I’ in order to uncover its non-existent sensory basis.

In relation to fashion Hume’s perspective can entail restoring the importance of directly felt sensory experiences clothes may evoke, rather than focusing on the linguistically constructed meanings of the items of clothing we wear. In this light, an insistence upon the linguistically expressed meanings of fashion results in the emphasis and examination of ideas, which cannot be directly sensed and must be regarded a fiction; a belief that has resulted from the principles of association of ideas. Viewing fashion through Hume’s perspective can lead us away from meanings and identities that may be related to fashion and may motivate an examination of the direct impressions of sensation that can be related to the wearing of clothes on the body; the simple causes and effects that can convincingly be related. These simple causes and effects are what clothes can *do* rather than what they may represent. This entails a focus upon how affective forces work upon our bodies and senses with such strength that they are overwhelming and disable thoughtful explanations.

This paragraph summarises, albeit in my words, the list of the new concepts Hume created according to Gilles Deleuze in his *Empiricism and Subjectivity* (1991 [1953]).

The focus upon experiences resulting from material forces can be tied to the phenomenological concept of ‘intentionality’ in which experiences are emphasised as ‘about’ or ‘of’ some object. German phenomenological philosopher Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) who is regarded the founder of phenomenology, »
Apart from the fact that coarse materials cause the skin to itch, high heels change the way one moves and wearing certain colours may emphasise the colour of one’s eyes or complexion, Hume’s emphasis upon sensory experiences can be inspiring for future fashion designs in which the sounds and smells, tastes and tactility that bear the potential of arousing our senses are incorporated for what they may do to the body. The Amsterdam-based MediaLAB has created a necklace that produces a slight scent when its wearer slouches so that she becomes aware of her posture and corrects it (see Figure 2.3).\(^{26}\) The idea behind the necklace named PosturAroma is that women who display a confident and upright posture are safer in public than those who arch their backs and make themselves small and vulnerable. The smell the necklace releases is a

\[\text{« wrote that “Hume’s } \text{Treatise} \text{ is the first design for a pure phenomenology” (} \text{Humes Treatise ist der erste Entwurf einer reinen Phänomenologie). From: } \text{Husserl, Edmund (1923-24) } \text{‘Erste Philosophie’ in } \text{Gesammelte Werke, Band 7, p. 157. Husserl, however, differs from Hume in the fact that the latter regards the ‘I’ as a fiction, whereas Husserl does not (Ibid.).} \]

\[\text{26 From: http://medialab.hva.nl/blog/project/womens-safety-nl/, retrieved September 2014.}\]
sensation which consequently raises the idea one needs to change pose and as such works according to the Hume system of perception through entering with such a force immediate action takes place.

Apart from smell, the sounds clothes make may also evoke impressions of sensation. The online fashion film platform SHOWstudio used sound instead of visuals to capture the essence of eleven garments from several Autumn/Winter 2006 collections in a project titled Anechoic. Recorded in a professional sound studio, one hears Christian Dior’s waxed taffeta print dress with stretch tulle drape lining rumbling when the model puts it on and crumbling when creased. Alexander McQueen’s tulle dress with metallic embroidery clatters like a waterfall and when the sleeves touch the embroidered body it is as if rain patters on a roof. Richard Nicoll’s PVC trousers with side zippers creak and squeak like old wooden floorboards when the model bends her knees; when she lies down the side zippers sound like a young wild animal trying to scare off a predator.

While the SHOWstudio sound examples have been amplified they still draw attention to the creative and expressive aspects of fashion often forgotten due to the focus upon more common signifying characteristics. Within the field of fashion technology many more possibilities of incorporating sound into garments arise. New York based artist Tesia Kosmalski’s Staccato Coat (2009) features small speakers integrated into the collar which produce typical traffic sounds such as a car horn, squeaking breaks and other more futuristic techno sounds which can be heard when the wearer walks and remain silent when she stands still. As shown in the accompanying video the sounds create a completely different relation to claiming public space; the unexpected force of the sounds the coat creates causes bystanders to move out of the way leaving the wearer with more space. In so much as Kosmalski shows a new way


28 Video of, amongst others, the staccato coat can be found here: http://vimeo.com/36210369, accessed September 2014.
in which our clothes may evoke reactions based on the sensory aspects they arouse, nevertheless it is imaginary ideas that lie at the basis of such creations. Hume demonstrates the complexity with which ideas develop, their essentially ambiguous character and the sensations that precede them. He reveals how a perspective upon the sensory forces of fashion is overshadowed by a focus upon processual ideas. As previously mentioned, he does not elaborate upon the fact that artists and designers may use complex ideas to create garments that in their turn can provoke the senses. I therefore suggest turning to ‘artist’s philosopher’ Friedrich Nietzsche and examine the role of inventions in fashion that allow us to rethink the relations between fashion and the body.

**Nietzsche’s New Look**

Imagine a tunic-like item of clothing that features three sleeves; a pair of trousers with separate legs; dresses with stuffed bulbous humps across the torso, on the belly, back, and shoulders, designs created by Comme des Garçons founder Rei Kawakubo. Or take Hussein Chalayan’s 2000 *Afterwords* collection, which consists of chairs that transform into suitcases while their covers become dresses and of a side-table that becomes a cone-shaped skirt. Consider also Issey Miyake’s 1999 *A-Poc* (*A Piece of Cloth*) collection which features tubes of fabric which can be cut into a complete wardrobe. How would one initiate thinking about these designs when guided by a principle of identity? Is Chalayan’s design representative of a table or of a dress? Is Miyake’s tubular fabric to be named clothing at all? Why design items of clothing with bulges where the body does not feature them?

Studying the designs presented above for what they are does not get one very far. They do not pertain to existing concepts of dress, but rather present new inventions that may be regarded for their revolutionary

---

29 Woollen pants with separate trousers (*Beyond Taboo* Autumn/Winter 01-02); cotton dress with three ruched and banded armholes (Spring/Summer 1984); *Body Meets Dress, Dress Meets Body* (1997)
Figure 2.4
*Body Meets Dress, Dress Meets Body*, Comme des Garçons, Rei Kawakubo, Spring/Summer 1997 Collection: Kyoto Costume Institute, photograph: Takashi Hatakeyama

Figure 2.5
*Afterwords*, Hussein Chalayan, Autumn/Winter 2000 Film stills: Marcus Tomlinson

Figure 2.6
*A-POC (A Piece of Cloth)* Issey Miyake, 1999 From the exhibition *ISSEY MIYAKI MAKING THINGS*, Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo, 2000 Photograph: Yasuaki Yoshinaga
power. Chalayan’s Afterwords collection may challenge the way we commonly look at tables and skirts. They may change the way we think about clothes as being worn into clothes that are being carried and may inspire an examination of the versatility of objects surrounding us.

Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche (1844-1900) recognised the revolutionary power of art with which new concepts for thinking can be created. These new concepts may change the ways in which one perceives the otherwise seemingly stable world surrounding us, and challenge a perception in which the difference between a table and a skirt seems clear and fixed. It is Nietzsche’s contention that relating to the world surrounding us guided by principles of truth also entails stabilising our conceptions whereas it may be questioned what is lost in such a perspective. “[T]ruth is ugly. We possess art lest we perish of the truth”, Nietzsche writes in 1888 (WP 822).\textsuperscript{30} He implies that art offers us a different and more open perspective that encourages experiences that are fuller and more abundant than reason may allow. He emphasises the destructive character of human beings in their relation with the earth when regarding themselves superior to it through the principles of reason, when he writes:

\begin{quote}
In some remote corner of the universe, poured out and glittering in innumerable solar systems, there once was a star on which clever animals invented knowledge. That was the haughtiest and most mendacious minute of “world history” – yet only a minute. After nature had drawn a few breaths the star grew cold, and the clever animal had to die.
(Nietzsche 1873, in Kaufmann 1977: 42)
\end{quote}

The ways in which we predominantly think about fashion can also be said to be based upon a striving to gain knowledge about what the clothes we wear may signify about our identities. And even though it is now widely agreed that fashion is not a practice that is guided by rationality our times may be regarded reminiscent of the way Elizabeth Wilson sketches the attitude during the industrial revolution of the late eighteenth century:

\textsuperscript{30} ‘WP’ refers to The Will to Power; the number refers to the number of the aphorism.
The industrial revolution consolidated western faith in the rational and reinforced the scientific attitude. The ‘real’ was what could be seen, measured, weighed and verified, and the methods of investigation of the natural sciences alone seemed correct. [...] Nature no longer seemed so awesome and mysterious, but became an object for human investigation, and a source of raw materials to be exploited. (Wilson 2003 [1985]: 60)

Similarly, the digital and technological advances of the twenty-first century encourage a perspective for measuring the (consumer) behaviour of people through analysing their digital data in order to offer consumers ‘personal’ advertisements.31 Further, scientific developments and innovations in fashion are predominantly geared by the increased possibilities of measuring the physical activities, size, and temperature of human beings in relation to garments (Daanen 2014: 25-29). Finally, material innovations, such as the incorporation of nano-particles in clothing know a predominantly scientific basis.

Although it remains in question to what extent the new technologies contribute to the destruction of our planet, it is evident that they revolve around measuring and identifying, rather than around the creative and aesthetical potential of fashion. The manner in which the mainstream fashion industries encourage over-consumption of cheap items of clothing must be directly related to the exploitation of not only natural, but also human resources.32 It is therefore of interest to examine the redeeming qualities of art that Nietzsche emphasises above. One may question what is overlooked and neglected when a focus upon representation and measurability prevails. As argued in the first chapter of this dissertation, fashion is essentially ambiguous. This would entail that apart from a perspective upon what bodies and fashion may be – how what they are can be determined – a perspective upon what they may do, which is less determined, is required. I will therefore examine Nietzsche criticism of...

31 See Chapter 3, A Delineated Fashion, for a more elaborate examination of this practice.

32 See Chapter 4, Clothed Connections, for extensive research into both the use of nano-particles as well as the practices of the fashion industries.
knowledge as well as the powers he assigns to art, in order to discover how the two approaches may be reciprocally dependent.

Knowledge, expressed in language and focused on reaching the truth, aims to identify what things are. Through knowledge we define, categorise and measure the world surrounding us. However, as Nietzsche emphasises, this knowledge does not come from the objects themselves, but rather from the identification of an object as being such an object in language. The rendering of objects in language also presupposes a distance from the objects themselves. Whereas two dresses are strictly speaking never the same, we render them in language and identify both items as belonging to the same essence and the concept of what is and what is not a dress receives our foremost attention. Or as Nietzsche phrases it:

> Every word immediately becomes a concept, inasmuch as it is not intended to serve as a reminder of the unique and wholly individualised original experience to which it owed its birth, but must at the same time fit innumerable, more or less similar cases – which means, strictly speaking, never equal – in other words, a lot of unequal cases. Every concept originates through equating what is unequal.
> (Nietzsche 1873 in Kaufmann 1977: 46 [emphasis added])

When an experience is rendered in words, becomes a concept and, as such, is made intelligible, as Nietzsche emphasises in the above, its uniqueness is subordinated to what may be known about the experience. In addition, the last words in the quotation above are reminiscent of Gabriel Tarde’s contention that existence equals difference, rather than compliance to an existing category in language (Tarde 1895: 40). Nietzsche is set to think about how concepts come about, what precedes them, and how art may reveal there is more to experience than its rendering in words and rather general concepts reveals.

Expressed in language, something is either a table or a skirt, a piece of cloth or an item of clothing, a body or a dress. This rendering of objects in words presupposes a distance from the object itself as Chalayan’s table-skirt, Miyake’s A-POC, and Kawakubo’s Body Meets Dress, Dress Meets Body demonstrate. A focus upon what objects are also limits knowledge of them to already known essences expressed in language, be
it words or numbers, which in turn restricts what may be unique experiences of objects to rational descriptions. Strictly speaking no two (or more) experiences are the same. Moreover, experiences do not let themselves be captured by the concepts we have designed to grasp them. The concept of ‘looking good’ implies that there is a certain standard of what a ‘good look’ entails. Since we tend to foreground the standardised concept, we subordinate a fuller experience also present to that what may be compared to other instances and experiences of what ‘looking good’ entails.

Similarly to Hume, Nietzsche foregrounds the sensuous aspect of experiences that tends to be overlooked when focussing upon intelligible knowledge (WP 809, 821). However, he does not restrict himself to physical experiences alone, such as Hume did when emphasising how pleasure, pain, thirst, hunger, heat and cold work upon the body and lead to ideas through the transforming qualities of imaginings. Nietzsche does share with Hume a perspective upon less rational and more animalistic experiences, but adds the concepts of inner drives and intuition which he regards unfit to be explained by language (Daybreak II: 115). It is these drives and intuitions that, according to Nietzsche, are typically active when artists create new artistic values that are capable of undercutting established rational thought (WP 831). In other words, Art can liberate us from a predominant focus upon what objects and experiences are through the creation of new objects and experiences with new values, which find their origin in intuition and irrational drives rather than in intelligible thought:

The aesthetic state possesses a superabundance of means of communication, together with an extreme receptivity for stimuli and signs. It constitutes the high point of communication and transmission between living creatures – it is the source of languages. This is where languages originate: the languages of tone as well as the languages of gestures and glances.

(Nietzsche, WP 809 [emphasis added])

Nietzsche hence emphasises the idea that before there can be languages, there must be a source from which language originates. As clarified above, this original from which language emerges is above all intuitive, speculative and contributes to a state of ambiguity. Compared to fashion,
one could say that before one can determine who someone is, how
fashion may be measured, and what it may signify, there also must be a
source that is evidently more problematic to express in words. One may
acknowledge its presence through the essentially ambiguous character of
fashion.

Fashion revolves around gestures and glances, intuition and the senses and could it not be here where fashion’s origin is to be found? When dressing oneself, one does not necessarily rely on rational judgements alone to ‘compose’ one’s attire. Of course slipping into a pair of jeans and a T-shirt to run some errands does not involve much thought; these clothes are chosen for practical and rational reasons rather than for their aesthetic qualities. If, however, one is dressing for a night out, a first date, or a job interview, most likely more time and attention is spent to ‘feeling right’. One may turn to books for advice on how to dress for success, but with Nietzsche, one can remark that the intuition experienced in ‘feeling right whilst looking good’ cannot be grasped in general advice. When getting dressed for an important occasion and half a closet of clothes is tried on, ends on the bed, and is recombined before satisfaction is reached, we may become aware of the importance of less rational forces and drives playing their part. These forces and drives are foremost experienced intuitively and lead one to experiment before coming to a desired result. This is an experience general advice cannot incorporate for it must be uniquely experienced.

Before examining to which extent Nietzsche relates experiences, intuitions and the play of forces to an individual – and subsequently what may be said about the concept of personal identity through his philosophy – I propose turning to the work of contemporary Japanese fashion designer Rei Kawakubo. Perhaps her designs and accounts of the ways she relates to them can clarify where and how fashion’s forces, drives and intuitions contribute to new fashions and new ways of relating fashions and bodies.

*Kawakubo the Cat*

Comme des Garçons’ owner and avant-garde fashion designer Rei
Kawakubo has often remarked that it is her ambition to “create clothes
that have never yet existed” (Koda 2008: 35). This already complies with Nietzsche’s idea that it is through art and artistic creation one is encouraged to invent the new. This in turn allows one to relate to the surrounding world in new manners. Her designs indeed look like nothing one has seen before. The Comme des Garçons’ Spring 2014 Ready-to-Wear collection features skirts and dresses with padded, tubular shapes; dresses covered with box-like rectangular cages; a white top with three holes at the front and back through which black fabric comes pouring out; and shoes with padded or folded extensions (see Figures 2.7 - 2.11b).

Figure 2.7
Comme des Garçons, Spring 2014 Ready-to-Wear, look 2
Photograph: Vogue.co.uk

Figure 2.8
Comme des Garçons, Spring 2014 Ready-to-Wear, look 17
Photograph: Vogue.co.uk
Figure 2.9
Comme des Garçons, Spring 2014
Ready-to-Wear, look 15
Photograph: Vogue.co.uk

Figure 2.10
Comme des Garçons, Spring 2014
Ready-to-Wear, look 15 (detail)
Photograph: Vogue.co.uk

Figure 2.11
Comme des Garçons, Spring 2014
Ready-to-Wear, look 13 (detail)
Photograph: Vogue.co.uk
When asked about her work process Kawakubo writes that she does not follow the paths a more traditional designer may. She does not create mood boards or sketches. She does not start with a concept which is then carried on throughout the entire collection. Instead she emphasises that she finds moments and clicks rather than searching for her creations to come into being. Perhaps quoting her at length illustrates her design process best:

My design process never starts or finishes. I am always hoping to find something through the mere act of living my daily life. I do not work from a desk, and do not have an exact starting point for any collection. There is never a mood board, I do not go through fabric swatches, I do not sketch, there is no eureka moment, there is no end to the search for something new. As I live my normal life, I hope to find something that click starts a thought, and then something totally unrelated would arise, and then maybe a third unconnected element would come from nowhere. Often in each collection, there are three or so seeds of things that come together accidentally to form what appears to everyone else as a final product, but for me it is never ending. There is never a moment when I think, ‘this is working, this is clear.’ If for one second I think something is finished, the next thing would be impossible to do.
(Kawakubo, in: Horn 2012)

In the above Kawakubo emphasises that ‘something’ happens and initiates an idea which consequently prompts other ideas and inspirations to occur. This is a process that is never complete and Kawakubo’s designs
have not been consciously imagined but rather have simply happened to come about.

The process of ‘letting things happen’ explains why she also emphasises that she cannot explain her creative process and does not see the need to do so if she could (Dresner et al. 2008: 116). Kawakubo seems to affirm Nietzsche’s advice that an artist should not start with something that is already there, should not seek inspiration in fashion itself and build upon that, but rather create designs that encourage thinking about the ways in which one relates to fashion and the body anew: “One should not play with artistic formulas, one has to reformulate life, so that afterward it has to formulate itself” (WP 849).

What Kawakubo does and creates can easily be regarded as based upon intuition, rather than upon knowledge or rational decision-making. The magazine called Six, which Kawakubo/Comme des Garçons created between 1988 and 1991, affirms that the creations of Kawakubo and her team are intuition-based.33 Six is an exploration of the sixth sense, also known as intuition. In 2012 Kawakubo and Comme des Garçons teamed up with creative agency Meri Media and released Moving Six, a digital application for the Ipad, which features images and photography from the original printed magazines. The opening sequence of the digital magazine can be characterised as a surrealist sequence of photographs of, amongst others, architectural structures, people on the street and landscapes that appear in sequence, whilst smoke-like graphical shapes move across the images depicting flowers, clouds and sunbeams. By tapping, swiping and scrolling the viewer can engage intuitively with six different moving versions assembled from the images of the original print magazine.

Neither the original printed magazine nor its digital, moving version explicitly refers to Kawakubo or Comme des Garçons’ designs, it is as Russian film maker Dziga Vertov wrote in his 1923 Kino-Eye manifesto “a fresh perception of the world” (Stone-Richards 2008: 99). Part of the Vertov manifesto was reproduced in the first print publication of Six, 33 Not all Comme des Garçons collections are chiefly designed by Kawakubo. She, however, does instruct her team and supervises the process. Junya Watanabe, for instance, was an important designer for the brand from 1987 till 1992, when he started designing in his own name.
which was entitled ‘I am a Cat’ (1988). As such Kawakubo suggests that intuition (which cats presumably possess) leads to seeing the world differently and ultimately helps her to design clothes that do not resemble anything one has seen before.

Kawakubo may be regarded a Nietzschean artist that displays “an extreme receptivity for stimuli and signs” while making use of the “superabundance of means of communication” (Nietzsche WP 809).

The Comme des Garçons website, like the magazine, does not to revolve around communicating the collections, but reveals yet another manner of displaying superabundant means of communication. After entering the website one is faced with a collage of the first edition of *Raw Vision, International Journal of Intuitive and Visionary Art, Outsider Art, Art Brut, Contemporary Folk Art*.

Dedicated to the twenty-fifth year of existence of *Raw Vision* further clicking reveals more collages of artworks and photography published before in the magazine. Not one item of clothing by Comme des Garçons can be found and the list of shops that sell the collection, which is mentioned somewhere on the website, is not easily located. One scrolls and clicks through pages simply titled with a year – ranging from 2008-2014,
at the time of writing – followed by ‘Comme des Garçons’ which exemplify the collaboration with the artists featured. Once again there is no image of Comme des Garçons’ collection but the webpages are dedicated to the works of stop motion animators the Quay brothers (2009), Chinese artist Ai Weiwei (2011) and Joseph Grocker, a young freelance illustrator from Brighton. In issue 83 of *Raw Vision* Kawakubo explains her collaboration with the artists by stating that she wants to experience “the power one can feel when discovering something that is beyond what is seen or felt normally” and this is, as described above, exactly what she aims to do with her collections.

Artist and philosopher Erin Manning, in her philosophical exploration of Kawakubo’s renowned *Body Meets Dress, Dress Meets Body* collection (1997), also emphasises that Kawakubo’s designs allow one to look at clothing and the body differently (see Figure 2.4). Manning writes that we have a tendency to “abstract a body from the textiles that cover it” and this becomes problematic when faced with Kawakubo’s designs (Manning 2014).34 Abstractioning a body from the bulbous shapes featuring the *Body Meets Dress* collection, leads to questioning whether Kawakubo is drawing attention to deformities and our conception of beauty, or whether she is intentionally insulting the body. As Manning writes, such questions are the result of an habitual way of looking in which fabric serves and beautifies a body. Kawakubo’s intention to “break the idea of

clothes”, however, invites one to adopt a new perspective and regard the body and the dress as “complicit partners”. Or as Manning writes: “See textile in the moving, as an active shaping of what a body can do” (2014).

The Body Meets Dress collection may create awareness of the fact that we tend to distil the body from its surroundings and clothing. Additionally, it invites one to adopt a different perspective in which body, movement, and material appear together. If one experiences Kawakubo’s collections as such, one may recognise similar bodies, silhouettes and movement on the street:

See the movement that was made invisible by the tendency to abstract textile from body. See the backpack, see the cross-body purse. See the puffy coat with the baby underneath, collar slightly open for its head. [...] Wonder at how quickly just yesterday you were always able to see this body-dressed-for-winter as a body separate from its dress, at how quickly you unburdened the skin-envelope from its Michelin-Man coat. And note in surprise what Kawakubo’s work has given you: a new mode of perception.

(Manning 2014)

Human knowledge, one may conclude, has its limits; inventions, intuitions, fashions, and bodies do not. With Nietzsche and Kawakubo one may begin to see that the limitless openness, which characterises artistic creation, enables adventures, surprises and new ways of seeing. One does not necessarily need to dress in Kawakubo’s designs; even in relation to the clothes one wears, one can experiment, invent, and create new bodies, fashions and movements, albeit perhaps not as forceful as Kawakubo does. It is a matter of doing, rather than thinking; finding, rather than seeking; creating rather than adopting what exists already.35

35 In this light Gilles Lipovetsky’s description of open fashion (known in France as le look) is of interest. He writes that “[r]unning counter to all aligned fashions, including the antiseptic preppie code and the code of casualness, the ‘in’ look of the 1980s encourages the sophistication of appearances, the free invention and alteration of one’s self image; it reintroduces artifice, play and singularity” ((1994 [1987]: 106).
Deeds rather than Doers

In the former, we saw that Nietzsche argues that logic, rational thinking, and language fix the ever-changing physical reality surrounding us and that we favour a rational principle to our relation with the natural world rather than perceiving the dynamic forces and changes that also play their part. The question remains as to how he regards the subject in this philosophical thinking. Since we are ‘the clever animals’ we must attempt to question what we have lost when we gained knowledge, truth, and intelligible meaning. In the following I will therefore elaborate on the idea of there being ‘no doer behind the deed’, to which Nietzsche inspired philosopher Judith Butler in her arguing for the essentially fictive character of gender identity (Butler 1990: 33, 181). I will also research what Nietzsche may teach us about fashion’s prejudices when it comes to communicating personal identity.

Nietzsche’s critique of the expression of truth in language and reducing objects to names and identities resembles Tarde’s emphasis on difference when it comes to recognising existence (1895: 40). Nietzsche’s philosophy also shows a resemblance to Hume’s systemising of human nature and it inspired Butler to state that “identity is the effect of discursive practices” (Butler 1990: 24). But Nietzsche’s philosophy is also foremost a genealogy that exposes how we have become to believe in, amongst other things, a stable and unified ego, self, or identity. The title On the Genealogy of Morals (1887) is striking in this sense, as is the preface of the book in which Nietzsche emphasises that we question what we have experienced, what our life is, and what our being is afterward (GM 1 or Nietzsche 1887: 15). Nietzsche indicates that we have concepts of what life, experience and self is. He considers it his task to unravel how these concepts came to guide the way we think and act. He is set to restore (or revalue) a manner of thinking that he deems lost due to our predominant focus upon knowledge and language: “we are not ‘men of knowledge’ with respect to ourselves” (Ibid.).

In The Will to Power Nietzsche devotes several aphorisms to ‘Belief in the “Ego” - ‘The Subject’ in which he describes how and why we have developed a sense of unified, stable personal identity (WP 481-492). He

36 Nietzsche often uses these words interchangeably see, for instance, WP 481.
focuses on which characteristics of ‘being’ are necessarily maintained and which perspectives are unnecessarily overshadowed by our belief in who we are. In similar vein, language and logical thought have overshadowed more animalistic instincts; they have obscured our concept of self. Or as Nietzsche writes: “[t]he subject is not something given, it is something added and invented and projected behind what there is” (WP 481). Nietzsche, much like Hume, emphasises the fictional character of logical concepts or, as Hume names them, ideas. Both philosophers also foreground the importance of experiences preceding knowledge and emphasise their non-identical character. Since strictly speaking no two experiences are alike and nothing in the physical world remains the same, the One, whether it concerns personal identity or identifying objects, is a logical invention that is added to experience and as such considered a fictitious construct.

Two things are of importance in this light. First, Nietzsche does not deny the usefulness of logical inventions such as identity. Second, he nevertheless regards it necessary to destroy the logical concepts of identity, subject, being and ego. To begin with the latter, it is of importance to stress that Nietzsche holds the psychological belief in the subject, the belief in a stable and ongoing self, responsible – and required – for the foregrounding of the subsequent belief in knowledge and meaning (traditional philosophy), morality and God (religion) and the laws of nature (science) (GM 6, 2, 13-14). The idea that fashion can reveal our identities must also be regarded as the result of a belief in such a stable self. Fashion, as such, is then limited and foremost regarded as a means to (more or less logically) communicate the belief in a stable and ongoing self, whereas it may do much more than this and may change the ways in which we perceive movement, bodies and clothing.

Through regarding ourselves stable unities we have erected and emphasised a whole system of fashion that is based upon making unequal things, thoughts and events equal. Nietzsche contests the notion of the

37 For a more extensive account of the similarities between Nietzsche and Hume see Craig Beam’s Hume and Nietzsche: Naturalists, Ethics, Anti-Christians (1996). Beam notes that since Hume (Anglo-American) and Nietzsche (Continental) are philosophers of different intellectual traditions they have hardly been compared.
unified subject that lies at the basis of all systemised accounts of life, since it is through regarding ourselves as one, or as ‘I’, everything surrounding us is also measured along the lines of identity and representation:

[T]he presuppositions of reason (...) sees doers and deeds all over: it believes that will has causal efficacy: it believes in the ‘I’, in the I as being, in the I as substance, and it projects this belief in the I-substance onto all things – this is how it creates the concept of the ‘thing’ in the first place... Being is imagined into everything – pushed under everything – as a cause; the concept of ‘being’ is only derived from the concept of ‘I’...

(Nietzsche 2005 [1888]: 169)

Through unmasking the concept of ‘I’ as a logical invention that directs the way one perceives ‘things’ Nietzsche opens up a perspective for the plural, instinctive and chaotic aspects that are also part of reality. In relation to the unity of the subject this entails illuminating ‘the subject as multiplicity’ (WP 490). A belief in knowledge makes way for the belief in the body (WP 491). Belief in being is replaced by a focus upon becoming (WP 518). Nietzsche thus re-evaluates those aspects of life that have lost attention and urgency due to the primacy of the logical concept of the subject and restores the value of a plurality of bodies, forces, senses, instincts and nuances.

Thinking about fashion through Nietzsche’s prism would also entail a revaluing in which fashion’s signifying system is elaborated by a thinking that includes those less easily understood – but nevertheless experienced – forces, senses and instincts. It would be a philosophy of fashion that focuses upon multiple becomings, not for how they may be identified, but for what they can do. Whereas it is useful to recognise people and things for their being and, as such, through the logical invention of identity; it is through the experiment and risk taking, which characterise artistic practice, that logical perspectives are challenged, may become unsettled and change. Truth, logic and identity can then also be regarded as in need of new inventions, unsettling designs and change to ensure constant and endless revaluation of fixed knowledge.

Fashion is experiment, inventing things anew, constantly introducing
new items of clothing, new styles, new colours and new designs. In addition, when getting dressed we may also experiment by trying out different combinations. Intuition can be detected when we do not exactly know what makes an outfit ‘right’ or ‘wrong’. On the other hand, fashion is regarded for what it reveals about the person and body wearing it. With Nietzsche we may conclude the two ways one relates to fashion – one intuitive, the other definitive – are in a reciprocal relation, in which invention, experiment and intuition drive change and cause seemingly fixed ideas about what things are to be reevaluated and change also. Such a manner of looking at fashion does not only explain its ambiguous character, it also reveals that intuitive creation is a prerequisite for identification, which can only occur afterward; showing that what fashion is today will not necessarily be as certain tomorrow.

What we may know, say, and signify with fashion has its limits and with Nietzsche one could say that it is at this limit where it meets its unlimited grounds and can connect with a thinking that characterises what happens, rather than what is. We may, however, question what more may be said and thought about the intuitive, open-ended and unlimited realm Nietzsche assigns to art. I therefore suggest we turn to French philosopher Gilles Deleuze whose concepts resemble Hume’s and Nietzsche’s, but may allow an even fuller perspective upon forces and processes one can detect in relation to fashion.

**Gilles Deleuze’s Never-ending Dress**

French philosopher Gilles Deleuze (1925-1995) was not known for his interest in fashion. Even though he is often depicted wearing a hat there is nothing remarkable about the way he dressed. His philosophical

---

38 Deleuze did have extraordinary long nails, this, however, was assumedly to protect his fingertips that were painful to touch due to a skin disease. From: Shatz, Adam (2010) ‘Desire was Everywhere’, in London Review of Books, Vol. 32, No. 24, pp. 9-12. Web: http://www.lrb.co.uk/v32/n24/adam-shatz/desire-was-everywhere, accessed May 2015.
ontology, however, contains many references to fine art, literature and music. He has written extensively about cinema (1983; 1985) and devoted books to artist Francis Bacon (1981) and authors Franz Kafka (1975) and Marcel Proust (1964). Perhaps most importantly in the light of this chapter, Deleuze’s earliest works concentrate on his interpretation of David Hume (1953) and Friedrich Nietzsche (1962). In addition, current scholars are increasingly drawn to Deleuze’s philosophy. Elizabeth Grosz and Rosi Braidotti, for instance, take on a Deleuzian approach to feminism; Claire Colebrook and Ronald Bogue examine literature through a Deleuzian prism; Patricia Pisters and Patricia Mac Cormack focus upon cinema; Adrian Parr and Andrei Rachman on architecture; Simon O’Sullivan on art; Ian Buchanan on music; Betti Marenko on design; Laura Cull on performance art; and Erin Manning on dance, to name but a few.

Since Deleuze’s philosophical concepts are increasingly deployed to study contemporary cultural practices, as well as the thought that he may be regarded, at least to some extent, a successor of Hume’s empirical and Nietzsche’s transcendental philosophies, has lead me to conclude this chapter by examining what his philosophical concepts may do for studying fashion. Whereas Hume advocates sensory experiences as prerequisites for knowledge, and Nietzsche elaborates upon art and its intuitive drives and forces, I suggest inquiring how Deleuze’s concepts may offer another perhaps even more dynamic perspective upon what fashion may do and how this may work.

Weaving, Felting and Patchwork Quilts

Whilst researching theories of fashion in the former chapter, Elizabeth Wilson’s concept of fashion as ‘unspeakably meaningful’, ambiguous and paradoxical may be regarded as an ‘end point’; there seems nothing more to be said about what fashion may be. Though one may well question how this works. That is to say, on the one hand fashion is regarded as signifying, identifiable and representative. On the other hand, there is an intimate, intuitive and perhaps immanent quality to fashion that cannot be discussed as easily. It is the latter that Nietzsche found in art, and Hume assigned to the senses. How do these two realms operate? How do they
relate, influence, and cross over one and another? An answer to these questions will not only provide us with the means to think about fashion’s several ‘faces’, it will also allow the development of a dynamical perspective in which its unspeakable and meaningful qualities are regarded for what they do, how they facilitate each other and how forces and processes develop between the two.

The conceptual pair of ‘the smooth and the striated’ which Deleuze and fellow author and psychoanalyst Félix Guattari introduce in the last chapter of their *A Thousand Plateaus* may very well serve to mobilise a thinking about fashion that examines the dynamical forces and processes that characterise it (Deleuze & Guattari 2004 [1980]: 524). The model suggested by them may give the unspeakable a ‘voice’, or perhaps better: its role and force may be detected. I therefore suggest examining the characteristics Deleuze and Guattari assign to the smooth and the striated through the first model they envision to describe their rethinking of space as a dynamic interplay between nomad forces that may move in all directions (smooth) and the captured spaces that appear well-defined (striated). In this section entitled ‘The Technological Model’ Deleuze and Guattari dwell upon techniques used to produce textiles to visualise their conception of space as dynamical and interconnected. It may therefore provide one with an entry into their complex and conceptual thinking and writing by using examples anyone thinking about fashion will be accustomed to.

By introducing the concepts of the smooth and the striated Deleuze and Guattari create a manner in which to grasp the spaces or territories upon which also fashion may work. Whereas the striated is characterised by horizontal and vertical lines, much like in the practice of weaving, the nature of the smooth is open-ended, cuts across horizontal and vertical lines, and can be extended infinitively, much like one may do whilst felting.39 It is, however, important that although the smooth and the striated appear to be oppositional, their opposition is by no means simple and one may say that they cannot be compared since their natures are fundamentally different and as such incomparable. Deleuze and Guattari emphasise that the smooth and the striated spaces only exist in

---

39 Deleuze and Guattari introduce the examples of weaving and felting, to which I will return shortly (2004 [1980]: 524).
mixture, “sometimes causing a passage from the smooth to the striated, sometimes from the striated to the smooth, according to entirely different movements” (Deleuze & Guattari 2004 [1980]: 524). Bearing this in mind, I suggest following Deleuze and Guattari in their analysis and attending to the concepts separately and thereafter focus upon the constant interplay and dynamics of their respective forces.40

Firstly, Deleuze and Guattari discuss weaving as the construction of a striated space and refer to Plato’s use of the model of weaving as the paradigm for the ‘Royal Sciences’ that deal with that which can be calculated, measured and operates according to laws (Deleuze & Guattari 2004 [1980]: 525). Any woven fabric, they explain, consists of vertical threads that are fixed and horizontal threads that cross over and under these. The technique of weaving entails that the fabric is closed on at least one side, that being the side in which the first horizontal thread is inserted. A woven fabric typically has a top and a bottom side. A woven fabric is thus striated since it is delimited, can be specified, and is clearly defined. Weaving, however, must not be regarded a metaphor, it is a manner of envisioning the natures of spaces. A woven fabric displays an ordering that moves in two directions; either vertically (fixed) or horizontally (mobile).

Secondly, the technique of felting is used to sketch an impression of smooth space. Felt is created by entangling the microfibers of wool through rubbing the strands with warm water and soap. Felt can as such be extended infinitely - it is open and can be extended in every direction. Felt, as Deleuze and Guattari phrase it, “does not assign fixed and mobile elements, but rather distributes a continuous variation” (Deleuze & Guattari 2004 [1980]: 525). Smooth space can be said to be the space on which ‘ambulant’ or ‘nomad’ sciences operate; those sciences that do not have ‘metric power’ and rely on intuition, experimentation and creation.41

Weaving and felting, striated spaces and smooth spaces, and royal and nomad sciences do not, as mentioned above, appear strictly and

40 I have hence constructed my examination similar to the way in which Deleuze and Guattari have done so.

41 See Deleuze and Guattari 2004 [1980]: 410-413 for a more elaborate treatment of the Royal and Nomadic Sciences.
neatly divided. The pairs exist only in mixture (Deleuze & Guattari 2004 [1980]: 524). They do not appear in a hierarchy; one is not better than the other, just different (Deleuze & Guattari 2004 [1980]: 410). Deleuze and Guattari’s discussion of techniques of fashion as smooth and striated continues by examining the interlacings (mixtures) that one may notice. Knitting, for instance, creates a more dynamic striated space, less rigid than weaving. Whereas a piece of crochet is more open and can be extended in all directions and may entail the creation of smooth space, it, nevertheless, may also have a centre (typically when the work displays a circular shape). In other words, in crochet and knitting we can still recognise the smooth and the striated, when thinking about the techniques, however, the presence of the one in the other can also be detected.

Finally, Deleuze and Guattari use the techniques of embroidery and patchwork to show how particularly the latter enables thinking about how smooth space may emerge from a striated one. They describe how the seventeenth century settlers in America brought plain quilts with them from Europe. These quilts were embroidered with several themes, often stuffed, and typically made out of one type of material (see Figure 2.14). Deleuze and Guattari regard these quilts that relied heavily on the technique of embroidery as predominantly striated spaces.

One can distinguish several figures embroidered onto the material, the quilt has a clear top and bottom, is not open for extension and as such demarks a closed whole. Toward the end of the seventeenth century, however, the patchwork technique “was developed more and more, at first due to the scarcity of textiles [...]”, and later due to the popularity of
Indian chintz” (Deleuze and Guattari 2004 [1980]: 526). The scarcity of textiles brought about a different manner of constructing a patchwork quilt with a wide range of differently shaped pieces of fabric. Contrary to the stuffed quilt, the so-called ‘Crazy Quilts’ can be extended infintively and in all directions, do not have a clear top or bottom, and as such display a predominantly smooth space (see Figure 2.15).

Deleuze and Guattari insist that the development of the stuffed quilt into the crazy quilt – and therefore the emergence of smooth space from striated space – needs to be related to the migration of people from Europe to America, the scarcity of textiles and the increased importation of foreign fabric. Thus movement and speed (or lack thereof) become important vectors that may cause a change of technique and alter the nature of a space.\(^4\)

Obviously, Deleuze and Guattari do not limit themselves to needlework; they develop similar models based upon music, the sea, maths, physics and art, in which they examine the striation of smooth spaces and how in the course of this process forces are developed that allow new smooth spaces to emerge. Or as they write:

![Figure 2.15 Jubilee Quilt, 1878](image)

\(^4\) In this light *Fragment Textiles* (2009) by Dutch designers Berber Soepboer and Fioen van Ballegooien is of interest. In search for a more sustainable fashion, they created small squares and stars made out of wool that feature a slice on each side into which another square or star can click and hold. The cloth created by linking hundreds of squares or stars, which are also detachable, is hence changeable in colour and shape. See: [http://berbersoepboer.nl/#21](http://berbersoepboer.nl/#21), accessed January 2015.
What interests us in the operations of striation and smoothing are precisely the passages or combinations: how forces at work within space continually striate it, and how in the course of its striation it develops other forces and emits new smooth spaces.

(Deleuze and Guattari 2004 [1980]: 551)

It is the constant interplay between movements of striation and the re-impartment of the smooth on striated spaces that allows examining the processes and forces at work within time and space. Although one may conclude that smooth space with its potential, its open-endedness and its material forces is preferable to the organised matter, measurements and limitation of striated space, Deleuze and Guattari distance themselves from that idea. They conclude their chapter by stating that one should “never believe that a smooth space will suffice to save us” (Deleuze and Guattari 2004 [1980]: 551). That is to say, a smooth space is by no means ideal, it is the dynamic interplay of spaces and forces in which one is inseparable from the other that can be detected everywhere and which is of interest.

It may already be noted that even though smooth spaces are by no means ideal, their interplay with, and presence of them within, striated spaces entails a different manner of looking at reality. Rather than assigning one dominant perspective through which one may examine reality, Deleuze and Guattari instead focus upon the ways in which limited, well-defined and closed-off (striated) manners of thinking are the result of, and continue to be influenced by, open-ended, experimental and transformative forces (smooth). How and when spaces, such as the development of the quilts, transform is, furthermore, dependent on other elements. Without the migration of people, the scarcity of textiles and the import of new textiles the developments would have been otherwise. Deleuze and Guattari hence offer a perspective which itself may be extended endlessly and one could question the role of means of transportation (of people and textiles), the way the ocean (smooth space) is

43 This remark can also be regarded as referring to Nietzsche’s concept of art and the idea that it is art that may save us from the truth. Deleuze and Guattari, however, emphasise that the smooth – which may be related to art – always already contains the potential of the striated, and vice versa.
navigated (striated) and even the availability of needles and scissors.

One could also question what studying fashion would entail when examined through the concept of smooth and striated spaces. Deleuze and Guattari do mention a broader perspective upon textiles than the patchwork and quilting example presented above. They write that “fabric integrates the body and the outside into a closed space” (Deleuze and Guattari 2004 [1980]: 525). With clothing we close our bodies off from the outside and with the fabrics we use to decorate our houses we close the outside off and striate space. On the other hand, one’s habitat may also conform to outside space, as is the case with tents, boats, and igloos (Deleuze and Guattari 2004 [1980]: 528). Clothing may also connect the body to the open smooth space in which it moves. While wearing a black shirt when walking in the sun, for instance, the shirt will absorb the heat and pass it on to the body, which in turn is connected to the sun.

Moreover, smooth and striated spaces and particularly their mixtures and interlaces can account for the ambiguities apparent in fashion. Comme des Garçons’ designer Rei Kawakubo, whose work was discussed in the former section, may be regarded as someone who creates open spaces for fashion. By constantly seeking inspiration outside fashion itself she succeeds in breaking away from existing and striated ideas of what fashion may be in order to explore what its capacities are. One can nevertheless also purchase Comme des Garçons’ perfumes, T-shirts, rucksacks and shoes that comply with existing ideas of commercial fashion businesses and that are striated. One may notice that the smooth space in fashion ensures that its meaning is never settled. If meanings are settled and as such become striated, forces will inevitably come into play which enable new smooth spaces to emerge.

It is the ongoing dynamics, the movements, the forces and processes that all play their part in Deleuze and Guattari’s concepts of the smooth and the striated that serve well to develop a perspective upon fashion that does not foreground what it is, but rather incorporates what happens and what it may do. In addition, Deleuze and Guattari’s concepts of the smooth and the striated offer a perspective upon the forces and trajectories that are involved in changing fashions. One could say that sumptuary laws that regulated which materials and colours could be worn entailed a striating of space; laws closed off and organised what was worn in the public space. Since there are also forces present that will result in an
overthrowing of the laws, one could also say that space was smoothed due to the fact that people did not comply with the laws and eventually succeeded in smoothing social space again. The signification of wealth through fashion, specifically during the late eighteenth century, may be regarded as a striation of space, which is opened up and becomes smooth when one does not need to be wealthy in order to adopt the appearances of those that are. And lastly, the smooth and the striated and their interplay of opening and delineating forces may be regarded as concepts that allow further analysis of the ‘unspeakably meaningful’ quality Elizabeth Wilson adheres to fashion and its modern ambiguities.

The conceptual pair of the smooth and the striated – in which two different movements: one fixing, regulating, and organising a territory, and the other opening it up, disorganising, and fragmenting it – reappears throughout Deleuze and Guattari’s works, albeit in different constellations and related to different practices and purposes. Arborescent thought and rhizomatic thinking, majorities and minorities, extensive and intensive groups, in each pair there is a force that organises, and a second one – with a different nature – that breaks with organisations and wanders away, but that will eventually be re-organised, re-territorialised and re-presented. The dynamics of a Deleuzian focus upon the forces and processes involved in what we wear may prove utmost to be appropriate for studying fashion anew. I therefore propose further examining a number of Deleuze and Guattari’s other philosophical concepts to research where, when, and how fashion’s capacities may extend. Before doing so it is of interest to briefly examine their thoughts about the philosophical concepts of self and personal identity.

*Multiple Becomings before Unity of Being*

In the opening paragraph of *A Thousand Plateaus* Deleuze and Guattari write that they do not foremost regard themselves as stable unified beings but also acknowledge that they can be regarded as multiplicities. They are ‘several’, form a ‘crowd’ and have been ‘multiplied’. They consider themselves for their pre-personal qualities and connections instead of predominantly for their identities and concentrate on the dynamics of change, potential and multiplicities, rather than a presupposing a stable,
unchangeable one-ness for themselves. They also recognise the fact that they are habitual creatures that use names and language, but at the same time seem to want to open up the rigid models of common thinking in identities. Or as they write:

The two of us wrote *Anti-Oedipus* together. Since each of us was several, there was already quite a crowd. Here we have made use of everything that came within range, what was closest as well as farthest away. We have assigned clever pseudonyms to prevent recognition. Why have we kept our names? Out of habit, purely out of habit. To make ourselves unrecognizable in turn. To render imperceptible, not ourselves, but what makes us act, feel, and think. Also because it’s nice to talk like everybody else, to say the sun rises, when everybody knows it’s only a manner of speaking. To reach, not the point where one no longer says I, but the point where it is no longer of any importance whether one says I. We are no longer ourselves. Each will know his own. We have been aided, inspired, multiplied. (Deleuze and Guattari 2004 [1980]: 3-4)

Scholar Claire Colebrook writes that Deleuze and Guattari create themselves anew and no longer accept existing and already adopted values and assumptions: “We destroy common sense and who we are in order to become” (Colebrook 2002b: xvii). Being someone, as Deleuze and Guattari suggest in the quotation above, entails the idea that what makes us act, feel and think can be known, perceived and recognised. If, however, one takes into account that we do not know what a body or fashion can do, we cannot completely know ourselves or fashion either; what we are, and what fashion is, is preceded by continuous becomings.

Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of becoming (*devenir* in French) echoes Hume’s concept of self as a bundle of constantly changing perceptions. It may be compared to Gabriel Tarde’s concept of ‘having relations’ rather than being someone. Instead of presupposing a linear concept of identity for which events and experiences are related to the ‘I’ that precedes and perceives them, Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of becoming resembles the limitless, open and constantly changing characteristics of smooth spaces which can be extended endlessly. Or as Colebrook writes: “the self that contemplates is nothing other than the singularities
it perceives” (2002b: 155). These singularities are much like Hume’s perceptions; affects and intensities, which include ideas, expressions, sounds and movements which may even only be sensed and as such are not necessarily substantial, but always involve transformations. It is not the ‘I’ that is transformed that characterises becoming, but the connection with the transformative potential a body may encounter.

Whereas the concept of personal identity may be regarded as a widely adopted assumption and having a name enforces the idea that we are continuous beings, fixed upon striated space. Deleuze emphasises that finding a real name for oneself also entails a thinking that moves beyond the personal:

It's a strange business, speaking for yourself, in your own name, because it doesn’t at all come with seeing yourself as an ego or a person or a subject. Individuals find a real name for themselves, rather only through the harshest exercise in depersonalization, by opening themselves up to the multiplicities everywhere within them, to the intensities running through them. [...] One becomes a set of liberated singularities, words, names, fingernails, things, animals, little events: quite the reverse of a celebrity. (Deleuze 1990: 6)

It is through attempting to depersonalise oneself that one may open up and experience all the pre-personal multiplicities and intensities that ensure continuous becomings. These multiplicities within may be quantitative, such as the number of blood cells, viruses, and bacteria a body may carry. They may also be qualitative, such as intuitions, affects and beliefs. The latter may be related to the concept of smooth space, as examined above, whereas the former bears a relation with striated space (Deleuze and Guattari 2004 [1980]: 534). Deleuze and Guattari hence illustrate how before speaking of a person there are also prepersonal forces to be detected, from which a stable identity is derived. They emphasise that there are also intensities that run through these multiplicities to be detected, able of temporarily connecting with them. A dormant virus may wake up due to a harsh wind cooling the body; sounds may move us to tears; the sun, a dress and a colour may together bring great happiness.

Intensive multiplicities affect and change when they encounter other multiplicities and these forces, processes and becomings may be noticed
before a concept of identity comes into being. Assigning ourselves an a priori identity and regarding our surroundings from this point of view entails obscuring the forces and processes that are also always there. When one regards items of clothing worn primarily as representative for the identity of the wearer, the less quantitative, non-representational aspects that are also present are easily omitted. What can be said about fashion’s capacities if a perspective upon the fertile ground that precedes and continues to influence identification and representation is developed? With Deleuze and Guattari, I suggest further examining the encounters, connections, forces and processes that precede the manner in which fashion is organised. Or as they write:

There are only relations of movement and rest, speed and slowness between unformed elements, or at least between elements that are relatively unformed, molecules, and particles of all kinds. There are only haecceities, affects, subjectless individuations that constitute collective assemblages. [...] We call this plane, which knows only longitudes and latitudes, speeds and haecceities, the plane of consistency or composition (as opposed to a plan(e) of organization or development).

(Deleuze and Guattari 2004 [1980]: 294)

By emphasising the potentiality of relations, connections and encounters Deleuze and Guattari provide us with a way of thinking the world differently. By opening ourselves up to a perspective that is not pre-ordered, but characterised for its dynamics, we may enhance our habitual views and thinking in what is, to discover what constantly becomes. For fashion, such a perspective would entail thinking about what happens between a body, clothing and environments. It would also enable one to think about which processes precede a relation of fashion with the representation of identity. Finally, it implies a thinking about fashion in which a human being is of no more importance than the subject-less individuations, the multiplicities and intensities, the movements and speeds which are involved in its becomings. One is not better than the other, just

44 See Chapter 4, Clothed Connections, in which I develop a perspective upon connections one may detect within fashion through Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of ‘desire’ which enables and informs ‘assemblages’.
different. It is the different natures in play that account for ambiguity, change and creation of new fashions.

Conclusion

Thinking about fashion through a traditional philosophical perspective in which rational arguments are phrased to examine human beings, their behaviour and the meanings of fashion does not get one very far. In this chapter alternative philosophical trajectories have been examined and these prove more promising for researching what fashion can do. Perhaps most remarkable is that the philosophies of David Hume, Friedrich Nietzsche and Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari depart from pre-personal, pre-individual and pre-subjective perspectives. They question what makes us think. Whereas fashion has always been regarded an essentially human and as such social and cultural practice, its ties with the forces, intuitions and affects that are not necessarily human or rational have, to my knowledge, never been extensively explored.

This chapter shows that there are good reasons for adopting such an experimental and philosophical perspective of fashion. Hume, Nietzsche and Deleuze and Guattari convincingly argue that concepts of identity, culture, language and fashion emerge from pre-personal forces and processes, which explains their ambiguous characters. With Hume one is encouraged to think about the sensuous forces involved in what fashion can do. An itchy jumper, too tight clothing and uncomfortable high heels arouse our senses with a force that may overpower our rationale and, according to Hume, lie at the basis of the imaginative and fictitious ideas that are consequently developed. With regard to fashion, ideas may also master physical discomfort, which is the case when clothing and shoes are worn for their appearance. From Hume one may draw the conclusion that fashion’s ‘imaginings’ are important factors that influence what we wear, though they are nevertheless essentially pretences.

Hume’s philosophy reveals that fashion’s pretences are influenced by ideas and imaginings circulating in society, by memories and by reflexions that transpose sensations of pain and pleasure, heat and cold
into desires, aversions, hopes and fears. He illustrates the complexity of human nature (which is not as natural as the term may indicate) in which resemblances, contiguities and the relating of effects to causes obscure the more directly experienced simple ideas that are the result from experiences of sensation. Causes, according to Hume, cannot be detected apart from the sensations that make us think. The fact that one is inclined to relate certain causes to, for instance, gaining success on the basis of what one wears, explains fashion’s essentially ambiguous character well. Since these causes are contingent and by no means certain, a whole system of fashionable fabrications can be erected, believed for the time being and, in due time, will be replaced by new ones.

Whereas Hume does not devote his attention to the production of art, Nietzsche regards artistic expressions powerful means to overcome a predominant perspective upon rationally conceived truths. The artist, or fashion designer Rei Kawakubo in my account, may open up existing ideas and beliefs and offer creations that challenge the ways in which one has grown accustomed to view the world. The breaking with ideas of what fashion is by constantly inventing it anew, as Kawakubo does, encourages new perceptions upon fashion and the body that focus on what happens or what is done rather than what it may mean. Nietzsche does not limit his perspective upon sensations alone, but emphasises the drives and intuitions artists make use of to invent the world, or fashion, anew. Like Hume, Nietzsche states that these drives and intuitions cannot be known, we have no idea where they originate or how they may come into being. Once again, the absence of a cause results in essentially ambiguous and contingent creations of which only the effects can be detected.

Lastly, Deleuze and Guattari’s two-fold concept of smooth and striated spaces was examined. The interplay of forces that striate, limit, delineate and fix spaces on the one hand, and those that smooth, open, reach out and extend infinitively on the other, enable a perspective upon fashion in society that allows one to think about both the identifiable meanings as well as the underlying and extending qualities of fashion. Whereas Nietzsche may be regarded a critic of truths and Hume demonstrated that ideas are largely based upon imaginings, Deleuze and Guattari create two concepts that actively engage with one and another and cause changes and transformations to take place. Although smooth spaces are prerequisites for striated spaces to come about, the smooth
can also emerge from the striated. As such, what fashion is, is never settled and dependent upon the interplay of rigidifying and opening forces at a certain time and space.

Deleuze and Guattari’s concepts, furthermore, enable one to examine the processes that take place in fashion. They allow one to think about the interplay and dynamics that characterise fashion and account for its ambiguity. As such, a perspective upon fashion is developed that shows how fashion is ambiguous, open-ended and driven by change, but also how and why one constantly attempts to fix its meanings and foregrounds its identity shaping characteristics. In addition and like Hume and Nietzsche, Deleuze and Guattari offer a perspective upon fashion in which smoothing forces, that are not essentially human, play an important, if not crucial, role in what fashions and bodies may do. In the remainder of this dissertation, I will further examine some of Deleuze and Guattari’s other concepts that are relevant for fashion. Before doing so it is of interest to examine fashion’s striating forces in shops, on the Web and through the pages of magazines. Such an examination may clarify how a perspective upon fashion as representation of identities has come to prevail, which results this perspective brings about and how thinking differently may alter these.